

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00

DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 CIEP-01 FAA-00 SSO-00

NSCE-00 INRE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 PM-04 L-03 IO-13 SCA-01

PER-01 OC-06 CCO-00 USIE-00 /086 W

----- 006888

O R 241130Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6044

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSYLAGOS

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LAGOS AND BRUSSELS FOR FAA REP

E.O. 11652: N/A (DECONTROL 31 JULY 78)

TAGS: EAIR, CASC, AFSP, JR

SUBJECT: CIVAIR: PUTTING AIR MAURITANIA "OFF LIMITS"

REF: STATE 177875 (NOTAL)

1. I PLAN TO SEEK APPOINTMENT ASAP WITH MINISTER STATE NATIONAL
ECONOMY SIDI 'ABDALLAHI TO HAND HIM FOLLOWING LETTER IN ENGLISH
AND UBCH.

2. QTE DEAR MR. MINISTER:

ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS SINCE SEPTEMBER 1975, WE HAVE DISCUSSED
AIR MAURITANIA AND THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION WHICH A DYNAMIC
AND EFFICIENT CIVIL AIRLINE CAN MAKE TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.
YOU WILL RECALL I AM SURE THAT DURING THE COURSE OF OUR PERIODIC
DIALOGUE ON AIR MAURITANIE, I RAISED WITH YOU IN JANUARY OF THIS
YEAR THE QUESTION OF AIRLINE SAFETY AND THE PRESSING NEED FOR
ACTION TO IMPROVE THE PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES FOLLOWED BY AIR
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MAURITANIE IN ITS DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS.

YOU WILL ALSO WITHOUT DOUBT RECALL THE EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION WE HAD IN EARLY MAY ABOUT THE LETTER WHICH HUGHES AIRWEST VICE PRESIDENT ROBERT K. JORGENSEN SENT TO THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE, TRANSPORTATION, AND TOURISM ON APRIL 25, CALLING ATTENTION TO LAX SAFETY PRACTICES AT AIR MAURITANIE. MR. JORGENSEN NOTED THAT MANY OF THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEM AREAS FELL CLEARLY OUTSIDE THE NARROW FIELD OF AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE, AND HE EXPLICITLY DECLARED BOTH THAT HUGHES AIRWEST WAS THEREFORE UNABLE TO CORRECT THE DEFICIENT PRACTICES AND THAT HUGHES AIRWEST COULD NOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY INJURIES TO PERSONS OR DAMAGE TO PROPERTY WHICH MIGHT ARISE OUT OF THESE LAX SAFETY PRACTICES.

I KNOW THAT YOU WILL ALSO REMEMBER THAT HUGHES AIRWEST MADE A FORMAL WRITTEN PROPOSAL TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AIR MAURITANIE IN MARCH FOR A DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF THE AIRLINE AND OF ALL FACETS OF ITS OPERATION. LATER, AFTER DISCUSSION WITH THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION, VICE PRESIDENT JORGENSEN REITERATED THE OFFER IN HIS AIR EXCHANGE AND MAY 5 LETTERS, INCORPORATING A REVISED FORMULA FOR SHARING THE COSTS OF THE STUDY, A REVISION RESULTED IN A SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION IN THE TOTAL DOLLAR COST OF THE STUDY TO AIR MAURITANIE. BOTH THE INITIAL AND SUBSEQUENT PRESENTATIONS CONTAINED THE STATEMENT THAT HUGHES AIRWEST, IF SELECTED TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DIAGNOSTIC STUDY, WOULD GUARANTEE TO HAVE AIR MAURITANIE OPERATING IN THE BLACK IN EIGHTEEN MONTHS. UNHAPPILY, THE AIR MAURITANIE SAFETY PICTURE HAS CHANGED LITTLE SINCE THE HUGHES AIRWEST TEAM CHIEF EARLY THIS YEAR FIRST BEGAN CALLING SPECIFIC DEFICIENCIES, LAX PROCEDURES, AND QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES TO THE ATTENTION OF THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS OF AIR MAURITANIE, AND SINCE MR. JORGENSEN RAISED THESE SAME PROBLEMS WITH THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION ORALLY AND IN WRITING IN APRIL. AIR MAURITANIE FLIGHT CREWS ARE STILL FLYING FORTY TO FIFTY HOURS EACH MONTH IN EXCESS OF THE INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED SAFETY MAXIMUM OF 100 HOURS; CABIN CARGO IS STILL NOT BEING TIED DOWN SECURELY; EMERGENCY EXITS ARE STILL BEING ROUTINELY BLOCKED BY INCORRECTLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POSITIONED PASSENGER SEATS AND ETC., ETC. IN OUR CONTINUING DESIRE TO HELP THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA AND THE MANAGEMENT OF AIR MAURITANIE DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT, AND SAFE AIRLINE, ALL THE AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN EITHER DIRECTLY INVOLVED OR WHO HAVE BEEN CONCERNED INDIRECTLY HAVE OVERLOOKED ON-GOING SAFETY DEFICIENCIES, WHILE URGING CORRECTIVE ACTION AND OFFERING TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL ASSISTANCE.

AN OFFENSE AGAINST ACCEPTED SAFETY PRACTICE OCCURRED SATURDAY, JULY 17, HOWEVER, WHICH I CANNOT OVERLOOK. THE DIRECTOR OF MAINTENANCE OF AIR MAURITANIE AND THE PRINCIPAL DC-4 PILOT OF AIR MAURITANIE PUT THE AIR MAURITANIE DC-4 INTO SERVICE ON THE NOUAKCHOTT-DAKAR-NOUAKCHOTT FLIGHT DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE HUGHES AIRWEST TEAM CHIEF HAD DECLARED THE AIRCRAFT UNFIT FOR SERVICE, HAD ORALLY AND IN WRITING EXPLAINED IN DETAIL THE REASONS FOR HIS DECISION TO BOTH THE DIRECTOR OF MAINTENANCE AND THE DC-4 PILOT, AND HAD REFUSED TO SIGN THE REQUIRED PRE-FLIGHT CERTIFICATION OF AIRWORTHINESS FOR THE AIRCRAFT. THUS, AN UNCERTIFIED AIRCRAFT WAS KNOWINGLY AND INTENTIONALLY FLOWN ON A REGULARLY-SCHEDULED INTERNATIONAL PASSENGER FLIGHT.

THE U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN MAURITANIA AND I ARE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THIS SAFETY BREACH BECAUSE ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE STAFF OF THE U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSION UNKNOWNLY BOARDED THE UNCERTIFIED AIRCRAFT IN DAKAR FOR THE RETURN FLIGHT TO NOUAKCHOTT.

AFTER EXTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE OVER THE PAST FEW WEEKS AND THROUGH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE WITH THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON ABOUT THE QUESTION OF AIR MAURITANIE FLIGHT SAFETY, AND AFTER INQUIRING CAREFULLY INTO THE JULY 17 SAFETY BREACH, I HAVE OFFICIALLY REQUESTED THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE TO PROHIBIT THE USE OF AIR MAURITANIE BY ALL UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. A FORMAL, INTERNAL U.S. GOVERNMENT NOTICE WILL BE ISSUED TO ALL DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND TO ALL U.S. DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS ABROAD WITHIN THE NEXT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DAY OR TWO. FOR THE MOMENT, SINCE VERY FEW AMERICAN TOURISTS FLY AIR MAURITANIE, WE DO NOT INTEND TO MAKE ANY RECOMMENDATION TO PRIVATE U.S. TRAVELERS OR TO PUBLICIZE THE INSTRUCTION WHICH IS BEING ISSUED TO U.S. GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AT THIS TIME.

IT IS WITH GREAT REGRET THAT I TAKE THIS STEP. MOREOVER, I WISH TO ASSURE YOU MR. MINISTER, THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THE U.S. CIVIL AVIATION INDUSTRY STAND READY TO HELP YOUR GOVERNMENT AND AIR MAURITANIE CORRECT THE CURRENT SAFETY DEFICIENCIES IN AIR MAURITANIE OPERATIONS AND RESTORE AIR MAURITANIE'S SAFETY RATING TO "ACCEPTABLE". SHOULD YOU SO DESIRE, ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE MADE TO BRING THE EXTENSIVE SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WHICH THE FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION HAS IN

THE FIELD OF AIRLINE SAFETY TO BEAR ON
THIS PROBLEM. ONE OF THE REGIONAL FAA SPECIALISTS
STATIONED IN LAGOS OR IN BRUSSELS MIGHT PERPHAPS BE
BROUGHT TO NOUAKCHOTT TOMAKE AN INITIAL SURVEY OF THE
PROBLEM, AND THEN ARRANGE FOR AN FAA SAFETY TEAM TO
COME HERE, ON A REIMBURSABLE BASIS, TO RAISE AND IM-
PLEMENT A PROGRAM OF APPROPRIATE CORRECTIVE ACTIONS.
I AM ALSO ACONFIDENT THAT HUGHES AIRFEST STANDS READY

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ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-02 CIAE-00 COME-00

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INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

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TO PROVIDE ANY ASSISTANCE THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA
OR AIRMAURITANIE MAY NEED OR DESIRE TO ATTACK AND RE-
SOLVE THIS CRITICAL SAFETY PROBLEM.
FINALLY, I PERSONALLY STAND READY TOHELP IN ANY WAY
I CAN.

COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE.

U.S, AMBASSADOR UNQUOTE.

3. AFTER SUMMARIZING LETTER, I INTEND TO ADD FOLLOWING
ADDITIONAL POINTS ORALLY: IN CONTINUING SPIRIT OF

FRIENDSHIP AND HELPUFLNESS, I HAVE MENTIONED ONLY THOSE SAFETY DEFICIENCIES WHICH HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE A MATTER OF WRITTEN RECORD. THERE ARE OTHERS, HOWEVER, SOME OF WHICH HAVE PERHAPS EVEN MORE SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS FROM POINT OF VIEW OF AIR MAURITANIE INSURANCE UNDERWRITER. SPECIFICALLY, (1) ON SAME DAKAR FLIGHT (JULY 17) BOTH SOUTH AND NORTH-BOUND FOR CONSIDERABLE PERIOD OF TIME THERE WAS ONLY ONE FULLY-QUALIFIED MEMBER OF FLIGHT CREW IN COCKPIT DESPITE REQUIREMENT FOR TWO; LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OTHER SEAT WAS OCCUPIED BY WIFE OF ONE OF CREW MEMBERS: (2) AT LEAST ONE MEMBER OF FLIGHT CREW HAD ONE OR MORE BEERS DURING DAKAR TURN AROUND; (C) DC-4 CREW HAD ALREADY FLOWN ALMOST MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF HOURS FOR WHOLE MONTH ON JULY 17; IT EXCEEDED 100-HOUR LIMIT JULY 20, AND IS STILL FLYING. DC-4 PILOT WHO DAMAGED TAIL SURFACE OF PRESIDENT'S NEW CARAVELLE WITH DC-4 WINGTIP TEN DAYS AGO IS SAME PILOT WHO STOPPED INCHES SHORT OF SNAPPING OFF LAMPOLE AT DAKAR AIRPORT JULY 17 WITH DC-4 WING. WHILE THESE TWO PILOT ERRORS MAY BE UNDERSTANDABLE RESULT OF SHEAR FATIGUE, THEY MAY ALSO INDICATE PILOT'S DEPTH PERCEPTION AS DETERIORATED TO POINT BELOW ACCEPTABLE LEVEL.

4. IT IS VIRTUAL CERTAINTY THAT LETTER AND OFF-LIMITS ACTION ARE GOING TO PRODUCE SHARP, ADVERSE REACTION ON PART OF GIRM AND AIRM. HUGHES AIRWEST IN CALIFORNIA AS WELL AS NOUAKCHOTT PLUS US MISSION AND DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE PREPARED. IN-HOUSE AND STRICTLY BILATERAL US-MAURITANIA NATURE OF OUR ACTION MAY KEEP REACTION IN GOVERNMENTAL AND COMPANY CHANNELS, BUT IMPLIED THREAT OF GOING PUBLIC LATER IF SITUATION DOES NOT IMPROVE MAY TRIGGER SHARP PUBLIC REACTION NOW. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, HOWEVER, THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO PROPOSED ACTION. SO LET'S BATTEN DOWN HATCHES SECURELY.

5. ACTION REQUESTED : (A) REQUEST DEPARTMENT TELEPHONE JORGENSEN AT HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL SPECIAL SUMMER SESSION SOONEST (AND PERHAPS MCMANMON IN PHOENIX AS WELL) TO INFORM HIM OF ACTION WE INTEND TO TAKE, BEING SURE TO READ AT LEAST SECTIONS OF PROPOSED LETTER ABOUT HUGHES TO HIM. DEPARTMENT SHOULD INFORM JORGENSEN THAT TEAM CHIEF PITTS WAS THOROUGHLY SHAKEN BY JULY 17 OVERRIDE BY MAINTENANCE DIRECTOR AND HAS NO OBJECTION TO PROPOSED OFF-LIMITS ACTION. WHEN I SUGGESTED PROPOSED LETTER MIGHT RESULT IN INCREASED DIFFICULTIES FOR HUGHES AIRWEST, AND MIGHT EVEN GET HUGHES THROWN OUT, PITTS' REPLY WAS " THAT MIGHT VERY WELL BE THE BEST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN AT THIS STAGE". DEPARTMENT MIGHT ALSO

INFORM JORGENSEN THAT PITTS HAS BEGUN TO DOCUMENT CARE-
FULLY ALL MATTERS INVOLVING SAFETY AND HUGHES PERFORMANCE,
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AND TO SEND COPIES TO APPROPRIATE HUGHES AIRWEST PEOPLE
IN US FOR SAFEKEEPING. (B) REVIEW PROPOSED LETTER, OB-
TAINING XTA CONCURRENCE IF NECESSARY, AND TELEGRAPH GO-
AHEAD TO MISSION SOONEST; (C) PREPARE AND TRANSMIT AP-
PROPRIATE IN-HOUSE NOTICE PUTTING AIRM OFF LIMITS TO
USG PERSONNEL; AND (D) INXLO AMBASSADOR KOCHMAN OF
ACTIONS BEING TAKEN, MAKING SPECIAL POINT OF RECALLING
TO HIM THAT I BROUGHT AIRM SAFETY PROBLEM TO HIS
ATTENTION DURING OUR MAY-JUNE CONVERSA ON SERIES HERE.

6. LATE FRIDAY EVENING, SEVERAL HOURS AFTER ABOVE WAS
DRAFTED, HUGHES TEAM CHIEF TELEPQNEDE TO REPORT AIRM
DC-3 (LEASED FROM AIR SENEGAL) CRASHED AND CAUGHT FIRE
ON TAKE OFF FROM TIDJADJKA. INITIAL REPORT INDICATED ONE
PERSON INJURED; MORNING CHAAB SAYS SEVEN LIGHTLY INJURED.
PITTS IS SLATED TO BE ABOARD AIRM DC-4 AUH
H IS FLYING
TO TIDJIKDJA SATURDAY MORNING TO BRING PASSENGERS INTO
NOUAKCHOTT. (HUGHES TEAM WAS RESPONSIBLE ONLY FOR "TURN-
AROUND MAINTENANCE" ON AIR SENEGAL PLANE.) AT THIS
POINT, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE-OR EVEN SPECU-
LATE WITH ANY CONFIDENCE--WHETHER FACT OF CRASH WILL
EXCABERATE OR SUBDUE GIRM REACTION TO OUR OFF-LIMITS
MOVE. SO LONG AS WE KEEP FOCUS ON JULY 17 INCIDENT
AND OMIT MENTION OF CRASH, BALANCE IS PROBABLY SLIGHTLY
IF FAVOR OF SOBER RESPONSE.

HANDYSIDE

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
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